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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Kirkwood Community College (KCC) to assess the role played by students' selection of a major as a predictor of academic success as measured by graduation from a two-year college. The study utilized computerized records and transcripts of students enrolled at KCC during fall 1974 through fall 1980. The records of a sample of 100 randomly selected students (or 0.5% of the approximately 2,000 students enrolled per year in Arts and Sciences) were used to verify credit-course enrollment and to separate students into career-oriented and liberal arts majors. Study findings indicated: (1) 95% of the students were liberal arts majors and 5% were career-oriented majors; (2) urban students were more likely to drop classes than rural students; (3) liberal arts students were more likely than career-oriented students to drop classes; (4) career-oriented students were ten times more likely to graduate in their initial major than were liberal arts students (80% to 7.4%); (5) males comprised 44% of the sample but accounted for 80% of the graduates and 27.3% of males graduated compared to 5.4% of females. Study recommendations include the identification of students most likely to withdraw, particularly part-time, female, and older students, and the establishment of an advising center to aid these and other students. (HB)

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AN EVALUATION OF THE USE OF MAJOR SELECTION TO PREDICT PROGRAM COMPLETION RATES OF CAREER ORIENTED LIBERAL ARTS PROGRAMS AT KIRKWOOD COMMUNITY COLLEGE

EDUCATIONAL POLICY SYSTEMS

by

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Kirkwood Community College

A PRACTICUM PRESENTED TO NOVA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

NOVA UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study was an examination of the role played by major selection as a predictor of academic success as measured by graduation from a two year college. The time frame for graduation was three years from the start of the program. The study involved examination of student transcripts from the period Fall, 1974, through Fall, 1980, at Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. A random sample was obtained, examined, tabulated, and analyzed.

The study indicated that selection of a career-oriented major can act as a predictor of academic success. Career-oriented students were found to have a probability of graduation ten times that of Liberal Arts students in the Arts and Sciences Division. Additionally, some of the characteristics of student less likely to succeed were identified. These included, older, part-time, female, urban students who did not have an academic advisor.

The recommendations included creation of an advising center for part-time students and students without an academic advisor or career-oriented major. Also, the author suggested that identifying students who do not intend to graduate would allow them to be excluded from attrition reports, and thereby lower attrition rates.

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Introduction

The purpose of this practicum was evaluation of the effectiveness of major selection as a device to predict program completion rates among career oriented Liberal Arts students. The results of this examination were to be utilized to determine if a policy change was in order regarding the allocation of available college resources. Previous college policy allocated extensive faculty resources and some physical plant resources for an Arts and Sciences advising system. This policy had been promulgated in an effort to reduce student attrition between the first and second year of attendance at Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

The college administration had long been concerned with the apparently high attrition rate of students between the first and second year of study. A number of theories had been put forth by staff members in an effort to explain this phenomenon. None had acheived much success as a predictive device. This may have been due to a lack of scientific research directed at locating the cause of attrition at Kirkwood Community College.

In 1977, a new concept was proposed and imple-mented at Kirkwood Community College. A team of faculty

members, who were perceived as being "student-oriented" were selected and subjected to a training program. This training program was intended to familiarize each member of the team, called "Super-advisors," with the inner workings of the institution. The team of "Super-advisors" was then charged with the responsibility to meet and advise incoming full- time Arts and Sciences freshmen during their first year of enrollment at Kirkwood Community College.

After the first year of this program, Sarah Klinefelter, Head of the English/Speech Department and the administrator in charge of the advising team, reported that seven more students had become sophomores than the previous year. This exceeded the goal of five students which had been computed by the administration to cover the costs of the project. The project was considered to be a success by the college administration because the target set for success was exceeded. The project was renamed the "academic advising team" and some new faculty members were selected for the team. They were subjected to a new training program and given the same charge as their predecessors.

Nearly half of the academic advising team was re-assigned for the second year. The author was one of those so assigned. The author observed that students who entered their first year with a career objective seemed to

do better than those who were taking courses, but had Liberal Arts as their major without a specific career-oriented program emphasis. The author proposed the hypothesis that goal-oriented students in career-oriented majors would have a higher probability of graduation than students in a less goal directed Liberal Arts course of study.

Administrators at the college were approached with this hypothesis and they granted the author permission to undertake the study. Students were selected using random number tables and their transcripts were examined to determine the answers to the following questions:

1. Did the student enroll in credit courses?

2. Was the student a career-oriented major or Liberal Arts?

3. What was the student's sex?

4. What was the student's age at the time of initial enrollment?

5. Was the student living in an urban or rural location?

6. Did the student change majors during his or her course of study?

7. Did the student graduate in the major initially declared or in some other major?

8. How many quarters was the student registered?

9. Did the student withdraw from classes in most

of the quarters he or she was registered?

10. How many classes were dropped?

The data were tabulated and later fed into an Apple microcomputer using "A-STAT," a statistical package based on Princeton University's P-Stat, and tables were generated. These tables were examined by the author and several opinions and conclusions were formed as a result.

These opinions and conclusions were presented to the Arts and Sciences Division Fall meeting in 1982 and were discussed extensively. A memo was written at the request of Dr. Louise McCants, Dean of the Arts and Sciences which summarized the preliminary findings. The memo was the basis for a recommendation to the President's Council for a policy change.

Background and Significance

The policy of the college to expend resources on an advising system for full-time Arts and Sciences students was in need of evaluation. The administrators involved had determined that it was cost-effective. The author raised the question, "Was it the most effective advising system to combat attrition?" This required the author to study not only the causes of attrition, but the characteristics of the student who became a non-persister.

Inadequate college records made it impossible to locate and survey students who were no longer enrolled. The author was concerned with completion rates and attrition and therefore was examining records of students who should have completed their program of study, or who were no longer enrolled at Kirkwood Community College. Therefore, the author was restricted to examining student transcripts. A ready source of information was the "inactive file" of students, which maintains records for a period of five years. The inactive file contains the records of students who have not registered for any quarter in the past three years, or twelve quarters. This file readily provided the author with student records which fit the first parameter of the practicum - did the student complete the program within three years from the

date of starting it? The inactive file which was utilized ended with the Fall Quarter, 1980.

The inactive file contains records of all credit program students. Some of the records examined by the author were of students in the vocational-technical division. They were not part of this study; their records were disregarded. The Arts and Sciences Division offered Liberal Arts and Career-oriented programs during the study. The author examined the differences in completion rates between these two groups of students. The author based this examination upon the choice of major made at the time of initial registration.

The selection of a career-oriented goal or major, is not necessarily a reliable predicitive device because it is not always made with the best of decision making ability (Stimac:1977:159). However, it can act as predictor of the future success of a student simply because the decision itself reflects an attitudinal awareness and this may effect future performance (Stock-Schmid-Sheinen:1977:73).

The selection of a career-oriented goal, or major, may imply an identification with the perceived self-concept of that career and its perceived status within society (Franklin:1977:285-297). That identification, may enhance the potential of the student for successful completion of the selected career-oriented

academic program.

In any event, whether by conscious decision, a positive attitude, or an identification with a particular career, students make a decision to pursue an academic objective. Whether they complete that objective and earn an Associate Degree is the basis of this study.

> "The literature on academic acheivement predicition is vast. Forcerly, cognitive criteria such as previous academic acheivement, and acheivement test scores have been used to predict future school success. However, mounting evidence questions the validity of these traditional measures, particularly for community college students. (Griffin:1978:14)

The literature shows that "... all types of students including those of serious intellectual interest and high academic ability, withdraw from the comprehensive community college. (Jones:1972:45). The identification of the student persister is difficult, because the persister has various and multiple personality traits. The student who drops out, or fails to persist, is also exhibits the same variances in personality and character traits. One group of students who drop out is perhaps easier to identify. That group is composed of those students who have "... a poor self-concept (and) little faith in his or her ability. They are often afraid to attempt a learning task. If they do, the level of acheivement is low." (Griffin:1978:8)

Another factor the author discovered in the

literature was that schools with small enrollments and small classes enjoy a higher retention rate than schools with large enrollments and large classes. (Blai:1972:1-23) Thus, the literature indicated that the reasons for academic persistence, or the lack of persistence, are many and the ascribing of a common trait or characteristic to those who fail to persist is merely an administrative objective.

This study was appropriate to the Educational Policy Systems Module because it dealt with an administrative policy decision which had not yet been tested by scientific educational research at Kirkwood Community College. The literature appeared to indicate that career-oriented, or goal-oriented, students would complete their programs at a higher rate than those students who did not have such specific career-oriented, or goal-oriented, programs. The practicum had the potential to indicate whether or not the efforts of the division's academic advising system were being focused and expended on students who would probably complete their programs in any event. If the data so indicated, the administration might decide to redistribute its resources in order to maximize the effectiveness of such expenditures. After all, "... the idea is to identify potential dropouts and intervene with appropriate services before they actually drop out of college." (Jackson:1976:22)

Therefore, the practicum was relevant to the college and to the module.

Procedures

Kirkwood Community College maintains computerized records and transcripts for all students. These records were the source documents for this practicum. The total number of students enrolled in credit programs at the college during the period from Fall 1974 through Fall 1980 was the population examined. The average number of Arts and Sciences students during this period was approximately 2,000 per year.

The sample drawn was 100, or .5% of the total population. The sample was selected using the computer generated list of names in the inactive file. A random number table was used to select one name from each consecutive group of twenty names. For each of the names on the master list, a transcript existed on microfiche. The transcripts were examined to answer the following questions:

1. Did the student enroll in credit courses? If "yes," go to question #2. If "no," he/she will not be part of the sample.

2. Did the student declare a major that was either Career-oriented or Liberal Arts? If "Yes," he/she will be part of the sample and answers will be coded in accordance with the code book in Appendix A. If, "No," then he/she

will not be part of the sample.

The majors that were considered to be Career-oriented, for this study, were: Law Enforcement, Education, Human Services, Aide to Handicapped Children, Community Corrections, and Fire Science. The majors that were considered to be Liberal Arts included: Liberal Arts, Psychology, History, Sociology, Economics, Political Science, Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, Physics, and Foreign Languages. During period of this study, most of the listed majors were combined into a single major entitled "Liberal Arts," but some of the sample transcripts had the specific discipline listed as the major. The author has combined all entries into the single heading of Liberal Arts for the purposes of this study.

There are certain assumptions which the author made in order to complete this study. Among them are:

1. All students had an equal opportunity to appear in the sample.

2. All students had an equal potential for success.

3. All students had equal financial resources with which to finance their education.

4. All students had a personal life that would not interfere with their pursuit of an academic objective.

5. All information on the transcript was accurate.

The study also had several distinct limitations, they included:

1. There existed no mechanism to trace students who transfer to other institutions so the study had to assume that students would not transfer before completing their program of study.

2. The study was limited to selected variables of the author's choice.

3. There was no quality control to assure that the transcripted information was correct.

4. The sample was limited to the last enrollments as contained in the "Inactive file," ending with the Fall Quarter of 1980.

After the data was coded onto computer input code sheets, it was entered into an Apple microcomputer using an A-Stat software package and preliminary analysis was done using that software to draw distributive statistics and certain selected comparisons.

The first comparison was to compare the distribution of the sample to the known distribution of the student population of Kirkwood Community College, as found in "Characteristics of Students at Kirkwood Community College - 1979," an internal publication of the Student Services Divison of the college, written by Dr. Donald Page. The sample was found to be representative of the population to within 2% in all catagories.

The author then examined the tables created by the use of the A-Stat package and did further analysis to draw inferences and conclusions. These inferences and conclusions were then used as the basis for recommendations which were made to certain college administrators.

Results

The first variable examined was sex. The data revealed that 44% of the sample was male and 56% female. The second variable examined was the age of the student at the time of initial enrollment. The data indicated that most students were under the age of thirty-one.

Table 1

Distribution of Sample by Age

Age	Percent of Sample
20 or less	2
21 through 25	42
26 through 30	28
31 through 35	9
36 through 40	7
41 and over	11
Unknown	1

The third variable examined was the address of the student, as listed on the official transcript. This response was classified as either Urban or Rural as defined by the U. S. Census Bureau's Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area. The majority, 70% lived in Urban areas, and 30% lived in rural areas.

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The next variable was the student's major. In the sample, 95% were identified as Liberal Arts majors and 5% were Career-oriented majors. This classification was based upon the students selection of major at the time of initial enrollment.

the next variable was, "Did the student change his or her major?" The data indicated that most of the students in the sample did not change their major once it had been declared.

Table 2

Did the Student Change Majors?

No	Yes, during first 44 credit hours	Yes, after earning 45 credit hours
78	14	8

Whether or not the student graduated in the major declared at the time of initial enrollment was the next variable examined. The most frequent response was "No." The data indicated that 85% of the sample did not graduate from the institution in any of the majors offered by the college, (Table 3).

The author also examined the total number of quarters that the student registered for classes. It was discovered that over half the students registered for less than three quarters of coursework, (Table 4).

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Table 3

Did the Student Graduate in the Major Declared at the Time of Initial Enrollment?

Response	Percentage
Yes	11
No, but the student did graduate in a career-oriented major selected during first 44 credit hours	0
No, but the student did graduate in a liberal arts major selected during first 44 credit hours	2
No, but the student did graduate in another major	2
No, the student did not graduate in any major offered by this institution as of the end of the time frame of this study	85

Table 4

Number of Quarters Registered

Quarters	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Percent of Sample	44	14	16	4	3	6	5	4	4

The author was also concerned with the number of part-time and full-time students; examination of the data disclosed that 47% of the sample were full-time students (12 quarter credit hours or more) and 53% were part-time students (less than 12 quarter credit hours).

The author wanted to know if there was a relationship between dropping classes and academic success. A question was designed to examine this variable. The data indicated that nearly two-thirds of the sample never dropped a course while enrolled at the institution.

Table 5

Did the Student Withdraw from Academic Credit courses in more than 50% of the Quarters for which the Student was Registered?

Response	Percent of Sample
Yes	17
No	65
Incompletes still on transcript	5
Non-credit grades	13

Examination of the number of classes dropped did not appear to provide any particular pattern. The largest group was the group that dropped one class, but there was

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some one in every group.

Table 6

Number of Classes Dropped

Classes Dropped	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 or more
Number of Students	8	5	4	5	3	4	1	1	4

Most students were not recent high school graduates, as evidenced by the age variable; most were female.

Table 7

Age by Sex

Age	under 21	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41+	Unknown
Male	1	15	17	5	2	3	1
Female	1	27	11	4	5	8	0

The largest group of students were part-time from an urban environment, (Table 8). Males tended to be full-time students and females, part-time, (Table 9). The older the student, the more likely that he or she would be a part-time student, (Table 10). The majority of Career-oriented students were full-time, while the majority of Liberal Arts students were part-time, (Table 11). Students in the age group 26-30 were most likely to drop

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classes, (Table 12).

Table 8

Full-time/Part-time by
Place of Residence

	Urban	Rural
Full-time	32	15
Part-time	38	15

Table 9

Full-time/Part-time
by Sex

	Male	Female
Full-time	28	19
Part-time	16	37

Table 10

Full-time/Part-time
by Age

Age	Under 21	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41+	Unknown
Full-time	1	26	15	2	2	1	0
Part-time	1	16	13	7	5	10	1

Table 11

Full-time/Part-time
by Major

	Career-oriented	Liberal Arts
Full-time	80%	45.3%
Part-time	20%	54.7%

Table 12

Classes Dropped by Age

Age	Under 21	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41+	Unknown
Number of classes dropped							
0	1	23	21	4	5	11	0
1	0	4	1	2	1	0	0
2	0	2	0	1	1	0	0
3	0	3	1	0	0	0	0
4	0	5	0	0	0	0	0
5	0	2	0	1	0	0	0
6	1	0	3	0	0	0	0
7	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
8	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
9	0	1	2	1	0	0	0

Urban students were more likely to drop classes than rural students.

Table 13

Urban/Rural by Classes Dropped

Classes dropped	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 or more
Urban	47	6	4	2	1	2	3	1	1	3
Rural	8	2	1	2	4	1	1	0	0	1

Males were more likely to than females to drop classes.

Table 14

Sex by Classes Dropped

Classes Dropped	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 or more
Male	25	4	2	3	1	1	3	0	1	4
Female	40	4	3	1	4	2	1	1	0	0

Liberal Arts students were more likely than Career-oriented students to drop classes, (Table 15). Students who changed majors were more likely than students who did not change majors to drop classes, (Table 16).

Table 15

Major by Classes Dropped

Classes Dropped	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 or more
Career-oriented	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Liberal Arts	61	8	5	4	5	3	4	1	1	3

Table 16

Major Change by Classes Dropped

Classes Dropped	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9 or more
Did not change major.....	54	7	3	2	4	2	3	0	1	2
Changed major in first year.....	5	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	2
Changed major in second year.....	6	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0

Career-oriented students are more than ten times more likely to graduate in their initial major than are Liberal Arts students, (Table 17). Most (72.7%) of the graduates were in the 26-30 age group, and 35.7% of this age group did graduate. Most of the non-graduates (40.7%) were in the 21-25 age group, and 95.2% of this age group did not graduate, (Table 18). Most of the graduates were urban. Of those who did not change their major and graduated, 54.4% were urban. 66.7% of all graduates were

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from urban backgrounds. But, only 14.3% of all urban students graduate, while 16.7% of the rural students do graduate, (Table 19).

Table 17

Major by Graduation
in Initial Major

	Career-oriented	Liberal Arts
Graduated in Initial Major.....	80%	7.37%
Graduated in Liberal Arts Major.....	0%	2.10%
Graduated in Another Major.....	0%	2.10%
Did not Graduate in any Major.....	20%	88.43%

Table 18

Age by Graduation

Age	Under 21	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41+	Unknown
Graduated	0	2	10	1	1	1	0
Did not Graduate	2	40	18	8	6	10	1

Table 19

Place of Residence
by Graduation

	Urban	Rural
Graduated	10	5
Did not Graduate	60	25

Although males only comprised 44% of the sample, they accounted for 80% of the graduates. Females, on the other hand, comprised 56% of the sample and only 20% of the graduates. Of all males enrolled, 27.3% graduated, however, of all females enrolled, only 5.4% graduated.

Table 20

Sex by Graduation

	Male	Female
Graduated	12	3
Did not Graduate	32	53

The author also examined the effect that changing majors had on graduation. The data indicated that 68% of the non-persisters did not change their major. The data also indicated that 12.8% of those students who did not change their major did graduate. Those students who

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changed their major in the first year garnered a 14.3% graduation rate, and those students who changed their major in their second year acheived a 37.5% graduation rate.

Table 21

Major Change by Graduation

Changed Major?	No	Yes, First Year	Yes, Second Year
Graduated	10	2	3
Did not Graduate	68	12	5

Discussion, Implications and Recommendations

The data showed that Career-oriented students in the Arts and Sciences division have a higher degree of successful completion of their academic programs than do Liberal Arts majors. However, it should be noted that this is due to factors beyond the simple selection of a major. The basic hypothesis that Career-oriented students will probably do better, in terms of graduation rates, is proven.

However, the data also indicates that there are a number of things that could trigger college responses in an effort to reduce attrition and improve graduation rates for all students. Among these are the following:

1. A vast majority of students in the Arts and Sciences never change their major once it is declared. Similarly, a vast majority of students do not drop classes. Therefore, when a student is dropping classes, or changing his or her major, that is the time for the college to take positive, constructive action to intervene.

2. It was noted that the attrition point in the Arts and Sciences division is not necessarily between the 1st and 2nd year, but rather, it appears to be between the 1st and 2nd Quarter. This, too, is a point where the

institution could take positive action to prevent attrition.

3. Attrition also seems to be a function of non-traditional, older, part-time students who are not in a career-oriented program, nor are they particularly concerned about earning an Associate Degree. If the college could identify this student, then that student would not have to be counted as a non-persister, or drop-out. Rather, the college could point to them with pride and show that it is providing educational opporunties for the individual in the community who seeks personal growth.

4. The author observed that a great number of the students who were part-time, registered for only one or two courses and then choose not to re-register. However, the types of courses which they registered for seemed to be the types of courses which were personal interest or personal development-oriented courses, such as: Human Potential, Assertiveness Behavior Training, Creative Writing, General Psychology, Social Problems, Career Decision-making, and Know Your Community.

Therefore, it is the author's opinion, that much of what is considered attrition, could be attributed to the college actually serving the individual needs of the community by allowing them to take courses of personal interest without having to go through a bureaucratic

admissions process.

There is another point, the target of attrition reduction. The college does lose students, but there is presently no way to determine how many of them have transfered to other institutions. Perhaps they, too, have fulfilled their objective at Kirkwood and it just doesn't happen to be graduation with an Associate Degree. Another group of students also comes to mind, the students who need to make up a short-coming in their course requirements to complete a program at another institution, these students take what they need and return to their home institution.

The majority of the non-persisters are part-time students, female, and older. The college needs to consider the establishment of an advising center to be staffed by advisors during most of the hours that the college is open. This advising center should be available to advise part-time students and Liberal Arts students who do not have a specific advisor. It is the author's opinion that advising, and good academic advising, at that, would reduce some of the attrition at Kirkwood Community College. Further, identification of students who do not intend to graduate from Kirkwood, would also reduce the perceived attrition.

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Appendix

Code Book For Practicum

Question #1 - What is the student's sex?

1 = Male

2 = Female

Question #2 - What was the student's age at the time of initial enrollment?

1 = 20 or less

2 = 21 through 25

3 = 26 through 30

4 = 31 through 35

5 = 36 through 40

6 = 41 and over

7 = Unknown

Question #3 - Where does the student live? (According to the official transcript)

1 = Urban

2 = Rural

Question #4 - What was the student's major at the time of the initial enrollment?

1 = Career-oriented

2 = Liberal Arts

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Question #5 - Did the student change majors?

1 = No

2 = Yes, after enrollment, but before accumulating 45 quarter credit hours of course work.

3 = Yes, after completing more than 45 quarter credit hours of course work.

Question #6 - Did the student graduate in the major declared at the initial enrollment?

1 = Yes

2 = No, but the student did graduate in a career-oriented major which was selected prior to accumulating 45 quarter credit hours of course work.

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3 = No, but the student did graduate in a Liberal Arts major which was selected prior to accumulating 45 quarter credit hours of course work.

4 = No, but the student did graduate in another major.

5 = No, the student did not graduate in any major as of the end of the time frame under consideration in this study.

Question #7 - How many quarters was the student registered?

1 = 1

2 = 2

3 = 3, etc. through 8,

then 9 = 9 or more.

Question #8 - Was the student full-time or part-time at the time of initial enrollment?

1 = Full time (12 credit hours or more)

2 = Part time (less than 12 credit hours)

Question #9 - Did the student withdraw from academic credit classes (not simply to change sections) in more than 50% of the quarters for which he/she was registered?

1 = Yes

2 = No

3 = Incompletes, still on the record.

4 = Q's, Z's, and other non-credit grades.

Question #10 - If Yes to #9, how many classes were dropped? 0 = Not Applicable

1 = 1

2 = 2

3 = 3

4 = 4 and so forth, until 9 = 9 or more.

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